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EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION MANAGEMENT IN KAZAKHSTAN'S SECONDARY SCHOOLS

This article examines the current challenges and strategies of educational innovation management in secondary schools in Kazakhstan. Within the context of systemic modernization, the institutional factors, barriers, and conditions determining the effectiveness of integrating advanced pedagogical and digital technologies into the educational process are analyzed. The empirical basis of the research relies on a mixed-methods design: a quantitative survey of 116 school principals was conducted alongside qualitative case studies of six educational institutions with varying resource provisions. The study determined the professional readiness of school leaders for transformational changes: the majority of respondents (62%) demonstrated an intermediate level of readiness, highlighting a shortage of practical managerial competencies. It was revealed that effective educational innovation management is hindered by three key interrelated barriers: an acute lack of practical knowledge among the administration (92%), weak professional motivation of the teaching staff (84%), and a critical deficit of material and technical resources (80%). Based on the findings, evidence-based recommendations and targeted interventions are proposed to overcome the identified implementation gaps. Specifically, it is proposed to introduce modular leadership development programs for principals, develop adaptive financial incentive mechanisms for teachers, and ensure a more equitable distribution of infrastructural resources. These measures will foster a sustainable development ecosystem aligned with advanced international standards. The results hold significant practical implications for state educational policy and provide a fundamental methodological basis for the systemic scaling of innovations.

Keywords: *educational innovation management, school leadership, teacher professional development, resource allocation, pedagogical technologies, digital education.*
Кілт сөздер: *білім беру инновацияларын басқару, мектептегі көшбасшылық, мұғалімдердің кәсіби дамуы, ресурстарды бөлу, педагогикалық технологиялар, цифрлық білім беру.*
Ключевые слова: *управление образовательными инновациями, школьное лидерство, профессиональное развитие педагогов, распределение ресурсов, педагогические технологии, цифровое образование.*

JEL M54

Introduction. In Kazakhstan, reform has almost always been the norm in school education; however, effectively managing innovation at the school level is fraught with difficulties. The obstacles are not a lack of goodwill, but rather a combination of factors including resource scarcity, principals' lack of readiness to lead teaching reforms, and schools' reluctance to break established classroom routines. Crucially, the innovation referred to here is not business innovation in enterprises, but rather the ongoing teaching reforms that public schools need to pursue—including new teaching methods, digital tools, and professional collaboration models.

Schumpeter's classic innovation theory for the business economy provides a general perspective on the concept of continuous renewal, but it cannot be entirely applied to schools [1]. In educational institutions, innovation is not achieved through market competition, commercialization, or productivity improvements, but rather through teaching technology, teaching quality, decentralized school leadership, and teacher professional development. Therefore, this study applies the general logic of educational innovation management to the specific environment of schools.

The most common obstacles in schools are limited training available to principals and teachers, financial and material resource constraints, and adherence to traditional teaching methods. In contrast, an

innovative school atmosphere relies on candid professional communication, careful development of school leaders, and an environment that encourages rather than punishes teaching experimentation and creativity [2].

By drawing together survey evidence from school leaders and a set of case studies, the article identifies these obstacles and sets out practical means of strengthening educational innovation management in Kazakhstan's secondary schools.

Its aim is to offer workable recommendations for building leadership capacity, allocating resources more sensibly, and encouraging collaboration — recommendations that speak to Kazakhstan's own reform agenda while remaining instructive for systems facing comparable pressures elsewhere.

It is essential to distinguish the focus of this study from innovation research in corporate departments. In this study, "educational innovation management" specifically refers to administrative support in the transformation process of secondary education, including the implementation of new teaching methods, the digitization of educational processes, and the development of professional learning communities, rather than competition driven by business or market forces. Additionally, the scope of this study is confined to secondary education in Kazakhstan. This limitation aims to bridge the logical gap between macro-level national policy agendas and micro-level school implementation, ensuring that the empirical findings derived from surveys of 116 principals can be directly applied to enhance teaching quality and leadership in secondary education.

Literature review. In the school setting, educational innovation management refers to the purposeful introduction and integration of new teaching methods, changes in organizational arrangements and adoption of digital technologies, with the ultimate goal of improving teaching quality rather than pursuing competitiveness or profit. A large number of recent academic studies have pointed out that school leadership is the decisive lever behind educational innovation: Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, through a synthesis of evidence from different systems, have shown that the impact of leadership on school improvement is mainly reflected in teaching quality, staff motivation and teacher working conditions [3].

Teacher leadership and professional development constitute the second pillar. Harris and Jones argue that lasting educational change depends on the role of teachers as co-builders of innovation within professional learning communities, a view supported by international evidence regarding the professional status and collaborative practices of teachers and school leaders [4]. In terms of instructional innovation, it tends to employ digital tools, adaptive curricula, and modern teaching methods to improve educational quality.

Digital transformation has become inextricably linked to the management of educational innovation. A systematic review indicates that a school's digital capacity depends not only on technology but also on the combined effects of leadership, teacher competence, organizational culture, and infrastructure [5]. Similarly, effective educational innovation management depends on an organizational culture that rewards collaboration and experimentation. Deeply ingrained habits and resistance to change are difficult to overcome without strong leadership and a genuine atmosphere of cooperation.

Resources remain a decisive constraint, particularly for rural schools facing limitations in funding and technology. Evidence regarding the digital transformation of educational quality management processes suggests that investment must be matched with management and instructional capabilities to translate into improvements in practice [6]. However, the actual effectiveness of these policies and partnerships in Kazakhstan remains uncertain.

Research conducted in Kazakhstan is growing, but still insufficient. Mixed-method studies on teacher leadership competence have shown that well-designed training programs can significantly enhance the innovative potential of an educational organization, while studies on school leaders during periods of change have shown that reform largely depends on the preparedness and support of principals [7]. The current literature still lacks empirical research linking educational innovation management to the daily educational environment of Kazakh schools — for example, the role of teachers, the long-term impact of policies, and comparisons with other secondary schools. This study aims to address these deficiencies and provide practical guidance for improving educational innovation management in Kazakh schools, drawing on the experience of higher education where necessary [8].

Methodology. This study employs a mixed-methods research design to provide a comprehensive understanding of educational innovation management in secondary schools in Kazakhstan. By combining quantitative survey data with qualitative case studies, the research aims to identify prevailing trends and explore the underlying institutional barriers to school modernization.

The quantitative component involved a survey of 116 secondary school principals. A purposive sampling method was utilized to select respondents representing diverse regions of Kazakhstan, ensuring a balanced mix of both urban and rural educational contexts. This approach allowed for capturing a broad spectrum of managerial experiences across different school environments.

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to assess principals' readiness for managing educational innovation and the obstacles they face. The survey instrument utilized a standard 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) to measure respondents' perceptions, along with multiple-choice questions to identify specific managerial challenges.

To gain deeper insights into the practical realities of educational innovation management, the quantitative survey was complemented by qualitative case studies of six secondary schools. These schools were selected based on their geographic location (e.g., three urban and three rural schools) and varying resource capacities to ensure a diverse and representative perspective. Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured discussions and observations of the schools' administrative processes.

The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Data processing and visualization were performed using spreadsheet software (Microsoft Excel). The analysis focused strictly on frequency distributions and percentage calculations to identify the prevailing trends in principals' readiness and barriers to educational innovation management.

Qualitative data from the case studies were processed using basic thematic analysis. The collected responses and case notes were reviewed and manually categorized into overarching themes, such as "resource constraints," "insufficient managerial preparation," and "motivational barriers." This qualitative categorization was used to complement, explain, and contextualize the numerical survey findings.

Main part. This section presents the results of an empirical study of educational innovation management in Kazakhstani schools, obtained through a questionnaire survey of educational organization directors and case study materials. The analysis aims to identify the level of readiness of school leaders to implement educational innovations, as well as to determine the key barriers and factors affecting the effectiveness of innovative processes in the school environment. Special attention is paid to the relationship between leadership, resource availability, the professional development of teachers, and the implementation of modern pedagogical and digital technologies, as these factors have a direct impact on the quality of the educational process and student learning outcomes.

Research Design.

The survey included respondents from various demographic groups, summarized in the pie chart below:

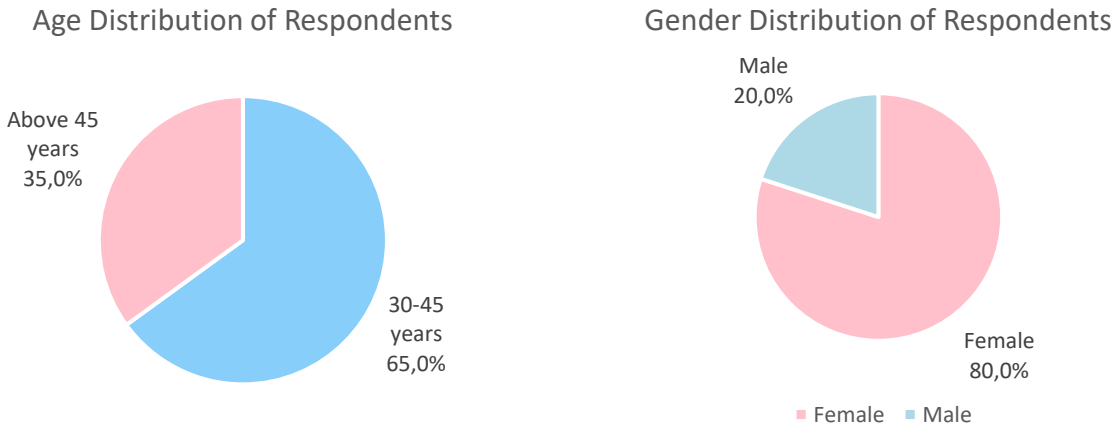

Figure – 1. **Demographic Distribution of Respondents**

**Compiled by the authors based on the 2026 survey data.*

Demographic analysis revealed that 65% of the respondents fall into the 30–45 age group, while 35% are over 45 years old. Furthermore, women predominantly hold school leadership positions, accounting for

80% of the sample. Overall, the majority of respondents are females aged 30–45, which highlights the need for targeted professional development tailored to this specific category of leaders.

These demographics align with previous studies that highlight gender and age disparities in leadership in education [9].

Survey Instrument.

The survey consisted of three main sections:

1. Demographics: Collected information on the age, gender, and professional backgrounds of respondents. This data helped in analyzing trends and patterns across different demographic groups.
2. Innovation Awareness: Measured respondents' understanding of educational innovation concepts, their familiarity with educational innovation management practices, and their ability to apply these practices in school settings.
3. Challenges and Solutions: Focused on identifying barriers to educational innovation management and gathering recommendations for overcoming these challenges.

The instrument was constructed from the existing literature and then sharpened through piloting with a small group of school leaders, a step intended to secure clarity and reliability. The comments returned from this pilot prompted revisions to the wording and ordering of questions, which strengthened the instrument’s validity.

Data Collection.

Administration took place online through Google Forms, a channel chosen for its accessibility, with each respondent needing roughly ten to fifteen minutes to finish. To approximate a representative cross-section, the sample drew on urban and rural schools across several regions of Kazakhstan, and invitations circulated via professional networks and educational associations [10].

For the qualitative component, six schools were selected on purpose to span a deliberately varied set of contexts — urban and rural, well-resourced and hard-pressed. Principals, their deputies, and teachers were interviewed at length about what managing educational innovation had actually involved, while observation of day-to-day operations and a reading of documents such as strategic plans and progress reports allowed interview accounts to be cross-checked.

Several safeguards were built in to bolster the reliability and validity of the study [11]:

- A pilot testing of the research tool was conducted to identify and eliminate potential shortcomings**.**
- To increase the reliability of the study, the triangulation method was used, which involves comparing data obtained from various sources**.**
- Peer Review: Preliminary findings were shared with educational experts for feedback and validation.
- Participant Validation: Respondents were given opportunities to review and confirm the accuracy of interview transcripts and key findings.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in line with accepted ethical standards, with the rights and confidentiality of participants protected throughout. Consent was secured in advance of any data collection, and respondents were assured both of their anonymity and of the entirely voluntary character of their involvement. Ethical clearance for the work was granted by the Institutional Review Board of Turan-Astana University.

Limitations.

While the mixed-method approach provided a comprehensive understanding of educational innovation management, certain limitations were noted:

1. Sample Size: The survey sample, though diverse, may not fully represent all schools in Kazakhstan.
2. Self-Reported Data: Survey responses relied on self-reporting, which could introduce bias.
3. Context-Specific Findings: The case study findings, while insightful, are context-dependent and may not be generalizable to all schools.

Results and Discussion.

Table – 1

Professional readiness in educational innovation management

Readiness Level	Description
High Level	Comprehensive knowledge of educational innovation, practical application of educational innovation management, creativity, and motivation for introducing such innovations.
Intermediate Level	Some knowledge of educational innovation, limited practical application of educational innovation management, limited creativity, and a positive but passive attitude towards such innovations.
Low Level	Minimal knowledge of educational innovation, lack of creativity and managerial reflection in educational innovation management, and a passive stance towards such innovations.

**Compiled by the authors based on the source [12]*

These bands make plain how unevenly prepared school principals are, and in doing so they point to the need for interventions aimed squarely at the particular gaps in educational innovation management capability.

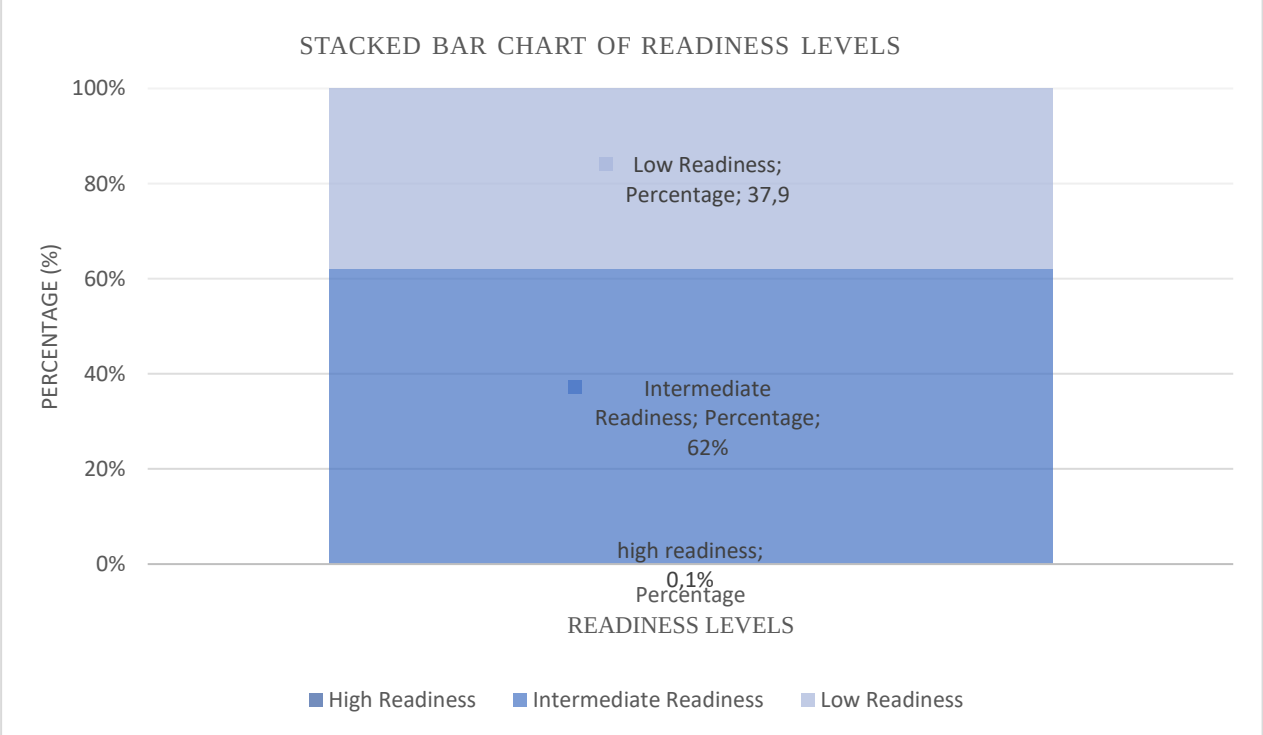

Figure – 2. **Survey Results**

**Compiled by the authors based on the 2026 survey data.*

- A majority of school managers exhibited intermediate readiness (62%), indicating some familiarity with educational innovation concepts but limited practical application of educational innovation management**.** This finding aligns with recent international studies confirming that mid-level professional readiness for educational innovation management remains a primary bottleneck in educational transformation globally**.** Current research highlights widespread implementation gaps across various educational systems, where school leaders often grasp the theoretical need for change but lack the applied methodological training to execute it [13].

- Approximately 37,9% of respondents demonstrated low readiness, characterized by a lack of creativity and minimal knowledge of educational innovation management.

- Only a minority of managers were categorized at the high readiness level (0,1%)**,** highlighting significant gaps in professional development.

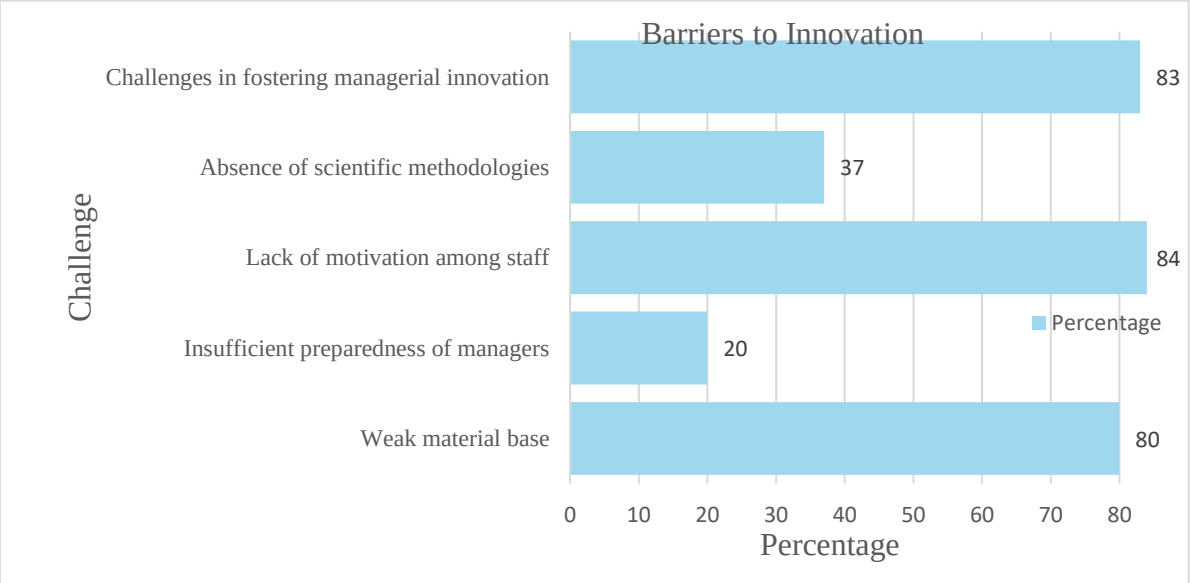

Figure – 3. **Barriers to Educational Innovation Management**

**Compiled by the authors based on the 2026 survey data.*

Among the difficulties respondents named most insistently were a weak material base and inadequate managerial preparation, which touched more than 80% and 20% of schools respectively.

Readiness for educational innovation management was sorted into three bands: high, denoting comprehensive knowledge and creativity; intermediate, signaling some knowledge but little practice; and low, indicating minimal knowledge and a passive disposition.

On this scale, 62% of school leaders fell into the intermediate band — acquainted with the basics yet applying them only sparingly — while 37,9% sat at the low end, lacking both the creativity and the management skills required for educational innovation.

The main barriers identified by respondents include a lack of knowledge (92%), low motivation (84%), insufficient managerial skills (20%), and weak material resources (80%).

The obtained data indicate that the insufficient readiness of school principals to manage educational innovations limits the implementation of modern pedagogical technologies, hinders the development of a digital educational environment, and reduces the effectiveness of professional interaction among teachers. Consequently, the identified barriers have an indirect impact on the quality of the educational process and student learning outcomes.

Respondents further singled out two persistent obstacles to mastering educational innovation management: a shortage of practical knowledge, reported by 92%, and the difficulty of organizing teaching staff, cited by 65%, both of which underline how much depends on leadership training and sound team management. Such implementation gaps are frequently cited in contemporary literature as a critical systemic barrier across transitioning educational environments, where school administrators often grasp the theoretical need for change but lack the applied methodological training and localized administrative support to execute it effectively [14].

The obtained results are directly related to the quality of the educational process in schools. The insufficient preparedness of leaders to manage educational innovations hinders the implementation of modern pedagogical technologies, including project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and interactive teaching methods. Limited managerial competencies also reduce the effectiveness of school digitalization, as the implementation of digital educational platforms and tools requires not only technical resources but also strategic leadership from the administration. Furthermore, the identified problems affect the professional development of teachers: in the absence of systemic support from the leadership, teachers are less likely to participate in professional development programs, professional communities, and innovative educational projects. Collectively, these factors impact the quality of student learning, as they limit the school's capacity to update educational content, improve teaching methods, and create a modern educational environment.

From an educational perspective, these models are quite enlightening. The lack of innovation among principals is primarily a teaching and professional development issue, rather than a business

competitiveness issue: it relates to their ability to lead curriculum reform, support teachers in adopting digital and active learning methods, and cultivate a culture of open classroom experimentation. Interpreted in this way, the survey results reflect the readiness of schools (rather than businesses) to improve teaching, and pinpoint the main drivers of change to school leadership, teacher motivation, and the equitable distribution of educational resources.

Barriers and solutions for educational innovation management are presented below (table 2).

Table – 2

Critical barriers to educational innovation management

Barrier	Proposed Solution	Expected Outcome
Weak material base	Targeted funding programs for resource development	Improved access to essential infrastructure
Insufficient managerial preparedness	Leadership training workshops	Enhanced decision-making and readiness for educational innovation management
Lack of motivation among staff	Incentive-based programs for teachers	Increased engagement in and adoption of educational innovation management
Absence of scientific methodologies	Collaboration with academic institutions	Development of evidence-based practices
Challenges in fostering educational innovation management	Establish educational innovation management hubs in schools	Promotion of experimentation and creativity

**Compiled by the authors based on the 2026 survey data.*

In summary, these findings suggest that schools in Kazakhstan need a systematic rather than piecemeal approach to educational innovation management**.** The best way to bridge the knowledge gap among principals is through targeted teaching and innovation leadership training programs; the pressure of limited resources requires strengthening the physical and digital infrastructure of schools; and the active participation of teachers and administrators can be addressed through incentive mechanisms. These measures should be viewed as an interconnected whole rather than isolated solutions and should be based on the school's educational mission to form a coherent improvement strategy [15].

In short, transforming schools from traditional management models to educational innovation management models is a systematic project involving many aspects. By simultaneously addressing deficiencies in teaching knowledge, lack of resources, and cultural resistance, schools in Kazakhstan can become a place where teaching innovation flourishes. Integrating leadership development with strategic planning and actively involving teachers, parents, and the wider school community are key to ensuring the sustainability of change, as evidenced by research on blended approaches in Kazakh schools [16]. The following recommendations are made:

Leadership Development.

- Train school leaders in educational innovation management practices.
- Encourage collaborative leadership models.

Resource Allocation.

- Strengthen material and technical bases.
- Provide financial support for educational innovation initiatives.

Teacher Engagement.

- Foster a culture of continuous professional development.
- Develop motivation-oriented programs to encourage teacher participation in educational innovation management**.**

Strategic Planning.

- Implement modular and systemic strategies for holistic educational transformation.
- Integrate educational innovation management into long-term educational policies.

Advanced Analysis.

The interdependence between resource allocation, leadership training and teacher engagement forms a dynamic scaffold for school innovation. It is this interconnectedness—rather than any single management technique borrowed from the corporate sector—that underpins the sustainability and effectiveness of educational change [17].

Conclusion. This study highlights the urgent need for a systematic and innovation-oriented management approach in Kazakhstan's school secondary schools. The study identifies resource scarcity, cultural resistance, and insufficient leadership training as major obstacles to building a sustainable school innovation ecosystem. When resources are effectively allocated, school leadership truly plays a transformative role, and modern educational management is effectively implemented, schools can better improve teaching quality and meet international standards.

The findings indicate that educational innovation management is far more than a purely technical or administrative task, nor is it simply commercial competition, it is a dynamic, collaborative, and education-oriented effort. Schools with visionary leadership, meticulous planning, and investment in teachers and resources are most likely to put educational innovation into practice and sustainably develop it. This study enriches the literature by providing empirical evidence on the factors contributing to educational innovation management in Kazakhstan's schools and offers practical guidance for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders.

Future Directions.

Both future research and practical effort might usefully concentrate on the following:

1. Impact Assessment: longitudinal studies that track how educational innovation management strategies actually affect student outcomes and institutional performance over time.
2. Technology Integration: closer inquiry into what emerging tools, among them artificial intelligence and data analytics, contribute to decision-making and to the conduct of teaching.
3. Policy Development: the design of policy that rewards collaboration among schools, private bodies, and government, so that resources can be pooled and good practice shared.
4. Equity in Education: a narrowing of the gap between urban and rural schools by means of targeted funding, technological provision, and sustained professional development.

By building on the insights gathered here and nurturing a culture of steady improvement, Kazakhstan’s secondary schools can position themselves as a reference point for educational innovation management among transitional economies, thus helping coming generations flourish in a fast-moving global setting.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАННЫҢ ОРТА МЕКТЕПТЕРІНДЕГІ БІЛІМ БЕРУ ИННОВАЦИЯЛАРЫН БАСҚАРУ

Аңдатпа

Бұл мақалада Қазақстанның орта мектептеріндегі білім беру инновацияларын басқарудың өзекті мәселелері мен стратегиялары қарастырылды. Жүйелі жаңғырту жағдайында оқу процесіне озық педагогикалық және цифрлық технологияларды енгізудің тиімділігін айқындайтын институционалдық факторлар, кедергілер мен шарттар талданды. Зерттеудің эмпирикалық базасы аралас дизайнға негізделген: 116 мектеп директорына сандық сауалнама жүргізілді, сондай-ақ ресурстармен қамтамасыз етілу деңгейі әртүрлі алты білім беру мекемесінде сапалық кейс-стади сериясы іске асырылды. Жұмыс барысында мектеп басшыларының трансформациялық өзгерістерге кәсіби дайындық деңгейі анықталды: респонденттердің көпшілігі (62%) практикалық басқару құзыреттерінің тапшылығын сезіне отырып, дайындықтың тек орташа деңгейін көрсетеді. Білім беру инновацияларын тиімді басқаруға өзара байланысты үш негізгі кедергі бөгет болатыны анықталды: әкімшіліктегі практикалық білімнің өткір тапшылығы (92%), педагогикалық ұжымның кәсіби мотивациясының төмендігі (84%) және материалдық-техникалық ресурстардың сыни тапшылығы (80%). Алынған нәтижелер негізінде енгізудегі кедергілерді еңсеру үшін ғылыми негізделген ұсынымдар мен мақсатты интервенциялар ұсынылды. Атап айтқанда, мектеп директорларының көшбасшылығын дамытудың модульдік бағдарламаларын енгізу, мұғалімдерді қаржылық ынталандырудың бейімделген тетіктерін әзірлеу, сондай-ақ инфрақұрылымдық ресурстарды неғұрлым әділ әрі мақсатты бөлуді қамтамасыз ету ұсынылды. Бұл шаралар озық халықаралық стандарттарға сәйкес келетін тұрақты даму экожүйесін қалыптастыруға мүмкіндік береді. Жұмыс нәтижелері мемлекеттік білім беру саясаты үшін жоғары практикалық маңызға ие және инновацияларды жүйелі түрде масштабтау үшін іргелі әдіснамалық негіз бола алады.

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УПРАВЛЕНИЕ ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛЬНЫМИ ИННОВАЦИЯМИ В СРЕДНИХ ШКОЛАХ КАЗАХСТАНА

Аннотация

В данной статье рассмотрены актуальные проблемы и стратегии управления образовательными инновациями в средних школах Казахстана. В условиях системной модернизации проанализированы институциональные факторы, барьеры и условия, определяющие эффективность внедрения передовых педагогических и цифровых технологий в образовательный процесс. Эмпирическая база исследования опирается на смешанный дизайн: проведен количественный опрос ста шестнадцати директоров школ, а также реализована серия качественных кейс-стади шести образовательных учреждений с разным уровнем ресурсного обеспечения. В ходе работы определен уровень профессиональной готовности школьных руководителей к трансформационным изменениям: большинство респондентов (62%) демонстрируют лишь средний уровень готовности, испытывая дефицит практических управленческих компетенций. Выявлено, что эффективному управлению образовательными инновациями препятствуют три ключевых взаимосвязанных барьера: острая нехватка практических знаний у администрации (92%), слабая профессиональная мотивация педагогического коллектива (84%) и критический дефицит материально-технических ресурсов (80%). На основе полученных результатов предложены научно обоснованные рекомендации и целевые интервенции для преодоления выявленных разрывов во внедрении. В частности, предложено внедрить модульные программы развития лидерства директоров школ, разработать адаптивные механизмы финансового стимулирования учителей, а также обеспечить более справедливое и целенаправленное распределение инфраструктурных ресурсов. Данные меры позволят сформировать устойчивую экосистему развития, соответствующую передовым международным стандартам. Результаты работы имеют высокую практическую значимость для государственной образовательной политики и могут служить фундаментальной методологической основой для системного масштабирования инноваций.